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SUBJECT: Indian Health Minister Favors Strengthening U.S-India  
Health Cooperation

11. (SBU) Summary: Under Secretary Burns met with Minister of Health and Family Welfare Ghulam Nabi Azad on October 15. Minister Azad thanked the United States for its assistance in the health field in India, citing collaboration in cancer, TB, maternal and child health, influenza, and HIV/AIDS as success stories. He expressed interest in collaborating on Global Disease Detection with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Azad stressed the importance of polio eradication and appreciated the support India receives from international partners. He also mentioned strengthening health and medical infrastructure and underscored the importance of transferring technology. End Summary.

12. (U) Participants

U.S.

Under Secretary William Burns  
Assistant Secretary Robert Blake  
Ambassador Timothy Roemer  
USAID India Mission Erin Soto  
NSC Acting Director Anish Goel  
Senior CDC Medical Officer Altaf Lal

India

Minister for Health and Family Welfare Ghulam Nabi Azad  
Secretary Department of Health and Family Welfare Sujatha Rao  
Secretary Department of Health Research Vishwa Mohan  
Director General Health Services Rakesh Srivastava  
Special Director General Public Health and Director National Center  
for Disease Control Shiv Lal  
Joint Secretary Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Vineet  
Chawdhry  
Joint Secretary Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Rajinder  
Shukla  
Director Americas Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal

Health Dialogue and PM Singh's visit  
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13. (SBU) Burns was joined by Assistant Secretary Blake, Ambassador Roemer, and NSC Acting Senior Director for South Asia Anish Goel. Azad expressed interest in establishing collaboration on Global Disease Detection (GDD) with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) in the areas of disease surveillance and detection of infectious agents. He also stated that the GDD Center at the Indian National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) would be useful for India in responding to international health regulations and for developing its global capacity for disease detection. (Note: A few days later, two GOI health officials told Emboff that "they are doing everything to clear the draft GDD agreement through the Health Ministry," and have an October 30 internal deadline. GOI health officials know a USG cleared version of the GDD agreement will be shared with them as soon as possible. Thus, there is a strong possibility that the agreement may be cleared by the GOI before PM Singh's upcoming visit to Washington. End Note.) Azad shared his views on the utility of establishing a bilateral dialogue on health between the two countries, stating, "the dialogue will provide a forum for reviewing progress of current programs and set [the] agenda for new initiatives". He also stressed the importance transferring health sciences technology to his ministry and institutions.

¶4. (SBU) Burns stated that the Health Dialogue will widen the foundation of collaboration opportunities and expand our cooperation by including relevant agencies of the U.S. government as well as private sector and non-governmental organizations. He also informed Azad of the U.S. interest in having Prime Minister Singh visit the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where several hundred Indian specialists are working on biomedical research and health sciences.

#### Continuing Collaborations

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¶5. (SBU) Azad expressed appreciation for the collaborative support his ministry receives from the CDC. Citing the example of novel H1N1 influenza, he thanked CDC for providing real-time support. He stated that during the onset of the H1N1 influenza outbreak in India, he closely monitored CDC and WHO websites for information. Azad expressed a desire to have his ministry work closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He also told Burns that funding for his ministry has expanded in the 11th five-year plan to USD 32 billion from a former figure of USD 7.42 billion.

#### Polio Eradication and Other Diseases

¶6. (SBU) Azad stressed that polio eradication will remain a high priority for the ministry, stating that the GOI has committed USD 998 million in the 11th five-year plan for this program. Azad expressed thanks for U.S. assistance in the development of vaccines against malaria and rotavirus, which are critical for India.

¶7. (SBU) Health and Family Welfare Secretary Rao expressed interest in strengthening collaboration in infectious diseases, such as drug resistant TB, establishing quality assurance and quality control programs for laboratories, and strengthening protocols for use of bio-safety level 3 and 4 laboratories in India. She also underscored the need for training in epidemiology in U.S. institutions and technology transfer of low-cost diagnostics products. Senior CDC Medical Officer Lal proposed a training program like CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS), which can train a large number of epidemiologists. Although Azad supported such an in-country training proposal, Rao later told Lal of her request for training 10-15 Indian individuals per year in the United States. (Note: The CDC can discuss this potential area of collaboration through the establishment of a GDD center in India. End Note.)

#### Next Steps

¶8. (SBU) Ambassador Roemer proposed frequent meetings between Embassy staff and Ministry staff to follow-up on implementing bilateral programs and ensuring their success. The Ambassador also shared information on the Cookstove project, a clean energy device, which will improve respiratory health by cutting exposure to smoke.

Burns emphasized the need for "cross fertilization with different dialogues," such as the CEO Forum and the Education Dialogue. A/S Blake added that the Health Dialogue will benefit by engaging with health components in the Education and Science and Technology Dialogues. Ambassador Roemer mentioned that the Nehru-Fulbright fellowships have a component on public health.

ROEMER